1: Burrows--170-171 (1947-48) Woleaians 1-4
116, 771, 798 Ifalik

"Religion, for the purpose of the following description, will be defined broadly and loosely, as any belief or activity that involves the supernatural. The supernatural, in turn, will be defined as an order of phenomena different from the common run and involving power of a mysterious kind, greater than everyday, well understood kinds of power.

Here and there in the foregoing pages there has already been mention of beliefs and acts that fall within this definition. They could not very well be saved up for a separate chapter, for the people of Ifalik are not inclined, as we are, to seal off religion from the rest of life. Their religion has been particularly evident in the accounts of fishing and navigation, activities which involve risk of failure and consequent disaster. Religion pervades everything they do.

For all the pervasiveness of their religion, the people of Ifalik make a clear distinction between natural and supernatural, or secular and sacred realms. As we shall see, the supernatural has its own personnel and its own geography. The distinction was consistently emphasized by Tom though he did not always draw the boundaries just where we might have done. Whenever anything came up that he regarded as religion, he would label it, 'talk for god.' Except in connection with canoe-building and navigation, he did not profess to understand much about it, and would nearly always consult the chiefs before giving any information. This seems to have been partly due to a special caution about revealing the sacred lore - another sign of a distinction between that and other

information. The people of Ifalik know that on all the islands round about, white men have attacked and, to a greater or less extent, destroyed the native religion. Because they still cherish their old faith, and get reassurance from it where they most need reassurance, they were naturally reluctant to expose it to attack by us or other foreigners.

Early in our stay, I made the mistake of failing to observe this distinction. Because the people seemed so frank and helpful, I decided to begin at the beginning in collecting tales, and asked about the creation. I got nowhere with my questions. They told me that all such matters had been forgotten. They, or rather their fathers, had made the same excuse to Sarfert thirty-eight years before; yet he had obtained some information. I gave them bits of this, following the newspaper man's technique of showing that something is already known, and thus suggesting that they might as well be frank. The chiefs did not remember Sarfert's brief visit, and were rather irritated and suspicious. They wanted to see the German book. But I had no copy, only brief notes I had taken, and fuller excerpts translated by Spiro. They admitted they knew the names of the gods he had recorded, but insisted they knew nothing more about them. At last it dawned on me that it was too early to try for that kind of information, and I asked for other kinds of stories, much to the relief of all concerned.

After the two-day ritual to be described later, I returned to the attack. At that time I was spending half of every day taking song texts; and it seemed appropriate to ask for the songs that formed part of the ritual. The chiefs began to give them, but - if I am

right about what happened - word of this reached Gargeligar, who may be called the native priest, and he objected. At least he spoke with the chiefs, whereupon the word issued 'No more songs.' Without questioning their decision, I made a little speech to them, which was translated by Tom. I thanked them for the songs already given, which would be most valuable; and regretted I could not have more. I added that I approved of what little I had seen of their religion and that, as far as Spiro and I were concerned, we would not try to change it, nor recommend any change to other Americans. [171] Fortunately for the purpose, I meant every word of it. It seemed to make the desired impression, for in a few days the flow of song texts was resumed, and eventually even the other religious ones were forthcoming - with only one exception that I know of. Meanwhile Spiro got around to interviewing Gargeligar. Partly in consultation with the chiefs, he obtained a number of the myths which, when I first inquired, had been ostensibly forgotten.

This chapter is intended to give a more comprehensive and systematic description of the religion than could be derived from the bits that come out in describing other activities. It will begin with what is available about beliefs; then will examine religious behavior. The account is by no means exhaustive. The tales Spiro collected, except for bits that seem essential to this account, will be left to him. Some of the interpretation, of a phychological sort, also belongs to his special problem. For that matter,

it is likely that a number of points, some of which may be quite important, have escaped us both."